

GAMES

FAQ

Q I'm new to PC gaming, and I find that I keep getting killed. Is there anywhere I can get reliable hints and tips?

A Newcomers to PC gaming often struggle with games that are designed for seasoned veterans. For single-player games, it's worth checking if there's a difficulty level setting. We haven't all got the time and patience of a teenager on their summer holidays, and playing on an easier setting is often the best idea.

If you need detailed help on a particular game, the best place to look is www.gamefaqs.com. It's an encyclopedic collection of user-submitted files including walkthroughs, strategies, maps and diagrams. Every major PC title is covered and all content is free. If you can't find the information you need, you can try the game-specific message boards instead.

If you find GameFAQs' text-only files a bit intimidating, you can try popular game sites such as www.ign.com or www.gamespot.com. They provide online guides with slicker layouts and pictures, although you may need to subscribe to access the latest guides. Alternatively, you could always buy a guide book for the game in question; www.amazon.co.uk does a good range.

Seth Barton

Video and games expert

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UBISOFT

Tom Clancy's Ghost Recon Advanced Warfighter 2

★★★★

£18 inc VAT

Ghost Recon Advanced Warfighter 2 is quite a rarity: a game previously released on a games console that hasn't just had a lazy PC conversion. Ghost Recon Advanced Warfighter 2 on PC is a different game to its Xbox 360 sibling. PC gamers are sure to appreciate the greater emphasis that's been put on the tactical elements of this first-person shooter.

You play as the leader of a squad of US soldiers sent in to quietly resolve insurgent attacks in Mexico. There are no heroics and each fight must be carefully planned out in advance. A top-down tactical map lets you give instructions to your computer-controlled squad mates, who act them out in real-time once you give the order. Use of cover and stealth is essential, as copping a few bullets means death. There are no health packs and ammo is in short supply. You can play on if you lose a couple of your team, but if your character is killed the mission is over.

There's a massive difference between the easier difficulty settings and the harder ones. On the former, you can play the game almost solo with the rest of the team trudging patiently behind you, which is too easy. On the hardest setting, it can be one shot, one kill, and your enemies are all-knowing and numerous. Precise placement of the other ghosts is essential. It's the way the game should be played, but it's very taxing for a casual or impatient player.

It's more thoughtful than the average first-person shooter, but it's also a little characterless. Your comrades and enemies behave



▲ Friendly fire won't make you tremendously popular in Tom Clancy's Ghost Recon Advanced Warfighter 2

like machines – either sluggish and stupid, or near-psychic crackshots. They possess some artificial intelligence, but it's purely functional and not remotely capable of making them behave like real people.

The setting and plot are simply window dressing, put there to link suspenseful scenes of combat. Mexico doesn't feel like a real place, just a virtual-reality simulation. There is a storyline, but it's all just tedious blather about your next objective. It's at its best in networked or online multiplayer, where your squad consists of real people. This generates more atmosphere and a greater sense of teamwork.

Ghost Recon Advanced Warfighter 2 is an improvement on the previous game, but it has all the hallmarks of a churned-out sequel, with tick-box

improvements instead of grand changes. It all works fine, but it's not quite as exciting as it should be. During the current shooting game drought, however, this game certainly fills a hole. It is a very polished affair, and the harder difficulty levels will make satisfying demands on parts of the brain that other first-person shooter titles leave untouched.

Alec Meer

SUMMARY

- ✓ Tense and thoughtful
- ✓ Great cooperative multiplayer mode
- ✗ Lacks personality

FIRST-PERSON SHOOTER Requires Windows XP/Vista, 2GHz processor, 1GB RAM, 128MB 3D card, 5GB disk space
PART CODE B000M3411M
SUPPLIER www.play.com
DETAILS <http://ghostrecon.uk.ubi.com/graw2>

Top 5 games

1. Lord of the Rings: Shadows of Angmar

£25 + £9 a month inc VAT ★★★★★



This online role-playing game lets you immerse yourself in Tolkien's Middle Earth. The game's detail is truly stunning, it's easy to get into and the combat is excellent.

SUPPLIER www.gameplay.co.uk **DETAILS** www.lotro.com **FULL REVIEW** Sep 2007



2. Colin McRae: DiRT

£22 inc VAT ★★★★★



This game is a double-whammy of remarkable graphics and intense physics. Never before has a road surface felt so real. It's an amazing leap forward for driving games.

SUPPLIER www.amazon.co.uk **DETAILS** www.codemasters.com/dirt **FULL REVIEW** Sep 2007



3. Supreme Commander

£20 inc VAT ★★★★★



This RTS has the biggest battles ever seen on a PC. There's a vast range of units to command and the graphics are slick, but you'll need a powerful PC to run it smoothly.

SUPPLIER www.amazon.co.uk **DETAILS** www.supremecommander.com **FULL REVIEW** Apr 2007



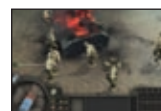
4. Company of Heroes

£15 inc VAT ★★★★★



This game looks fantastic, from the historically accurate units to the bombed-out French towns. But it's the innovative gameplay that makes it the best RTS around.

SUPPLIER www.amazon.co.uk **DETAILS** www.thq.com **FULL REVIEW** Jan 2007



5. FIFA 2007

£15 inc VAT ★★★★★



The fully licensed teams and slick presentation have always been welcome, but FIFA 2007 is easier to play than its predecessor. Arguably, the best football game around.

SUPPLIER www.play.com **DETAILS** <http://fifa07.ea.com> **FULL REVIEW** Jan 2007





▲ It's always good to have some friends behind you, even if you are the evil Overlord

CODEMASTERS
Overlord

★★★★★
£25 inc VAT

Most games put you in the role of the hero, but here you play as the evil Overlord instead. You're freshly resurrected and ready to smite the forces of good. Having said that, no-one here seems that innocent. The fantasy setting includes vicious unicorns, greedy halflings and dysfunctional heroes. All this gives a fresh spin to the usual fantasy genre and, as a result, this game is genuinely amusing.

Being a powerful dark lord wouldn't be the same without the toadying minions, though. Luckily, Overlord provides a powerful personal army. You have a gibbering, cackling and shrieking mob of goblins at your command. They are your main weapon and are more than capable of causing serious mayhem. Direct them towards anything and they'll kill, destroy or pillage it as appropriate.

As well as fighting, your minions must be used to solve puzzles, with large groups needed to move objects or open gates. There are four types of minion, all of which resemble goblins or gremlins, and each type has different talents. Red ones can throw fireballs, while green ones can sneak up on your enemies unaware. As the game progresses, you must use the various types in tandem to defeat powerful heroes.

You can support your minions with your own physical attacks, plus a range of spells. Recovering items to restore your ruined tower unlocks new spells and weapons. The easy-to-use controls let you direct both the Overlord and his minions simultaneously. It plays well using a keyboard and mouse, but as things get harder a joystick with two analogue sticks is better still.

The gameplay is fairly linear, and you'll often want to be more evil than the game's objectives allow. But while there's little we haven't encountered before in real-time strategy or third-person adventure games, the blend of the two is accomplished and the experience as a whole is highly entertaining.

Seth Barton

SUMMARY

- ✓ Minions are full of personality
- ✓ Amusing fantasy setting
- ✗ Linear gameplay

STRATEGY GAME Requires Windows XP/Vista, 2.4GHz processor, 512MB RAM, 128MB 3D card, 5GB disk space
PRODUCT CODE B000O315RA
SUPPLIER www.amazon.co.uk
DETAILS www.codemasters.com



▲ The Final Frontier scenario takes Civilization IV on to the galactic stage

TAKE2 INTERACTIVE
Civilization IV:
Beyond the Sword

★★★★★
£15 inc VAT

A good add-on pack improves upon rather than merely expands on the original game. A great one changes the nature of the game for the better. This second expansion for the acclaimed strategy game Civilization IV (which received our Best Buy award in *What's New: Games, Shopper* January 2006) manages both.

If you're a Civilization veteran, you'll find that the increased focus on espionage and corporations helps you conquer the world by non-military means. New buildings, technologies and units are available for both approaches, though, and mean new strategies are required for victory.

Random events, from natural disasters to arranged marriages, make an old formula more unpredictable. Most additions and changes flow into the existing game so naturally that a casual player won't notice they're there. They improve Civilization IV for veterans, but are too subtle to bring you back if the original game didn't hold your attention for long.

It still comes highly recommended due to the diverse new scenarios. Some modifications change the game completely. One sees you conquering galaxies rather than continents: it plays like Civilization, but looks and feels very different. Another sees you control a squad of future-soldiers as they fight alien zombies. Its combat-only approach distinguishes it from the money-making and city-building of the original. Other scenarios simply recreate historical periods or extend the game's timeline. Some are minor or uninteresting, but others deserve hours of attention. In any case, if you enjoyed Civilization IV at all, you'll find at least one scenario to your tastes.

Civilization IV: Beyond the Sword is an essential expansion pack for all Civilization fans. The scenarios alone should reignite your passion for strategy gaming.

Alec Meer

SUMMARY

- ✓ New ways to win
- ✓ New scenarios alter game completely
- ✗ Most changes to original game too subtle

STRATEGY GAME Requires Windows XP/Vista, 1.2GHz processor, 256MB RAM, 64MB 3D card, 1.7GB disk space
PRODUCT CODE B000PTJHKA
SUPPLIER www.amazon.co.uk
DETAILS www.2kgames.com/civ4/beyondthesword



▲ A bored pet is sure to get overly friendly with your sofa in The Sims: Pet Stories

EA
The Sims:
Pet Stories

★★★★★
£20 inc VAT

Pet Stories is the second in the notebook-friendly Sims Stories range, which means it should run on most PCs. It's basically a slightly cut-down version of the Sims 2, though this version also contains elements from The Sims: Pets expansion pack.

Preset scenarios, or stories, give you a series of objectives and act as extended tutorials. You'll meet Alice and her pet Dalmatian Sam, and try to save them from Alice's greedy landlord. Alternatively, you can play as Stephen the chef and his mischievous tabby cat Diva, who is desperate to shake the cobwebs off her boring owner. Failing that, there is also a freeplay mode for those who want to create their own pet.

There are all the usual options to modify your Sims' homes. You can buy pot plants, add mirrors or splash out on new furniture. However, you will have to be careful as your canine or feline friend may decide to attack your new sofa. Everything that you do in The Sims: Pet Stories affects your pet, even if you are just not devoting enough time to them. It is very important that you attend to the pets' needs at all times to ensure that they are properly trained.

Such goals include teaching Alice's dog Sam to stay or roll over, and are handled by choosing from a set of actions such as shooing, praising and scolding. Hours of patient repetition bring rewards, such as first-place prize at a Dog Show for Sam, but there's not much enjoyment along the way.

Pet Stories is about as time-consuming as owning a real pet, but without any of the affection. This may be a useful title to educate children – particularly those who are thinking about getting a pet – but if you have previously enjoyed The Sims 2: Pets then you won't find anything new to enjoy here.

Kevin Pocock

SUMMARY

- ✓ A good tool to test owning a pet
- ✓ Runs well on most notebooks
- ✗ Training can be tedious

SIMULATION GAME Requires Windows XP/Vista, 1.4GHz processor, 256MB RAM, 3.5GB disk space
PRODUCT CODE B000NG71WG
SUPPLIER www.amazon.co.uk
DETAILS www.thesimsstories.co.uk